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## Book Reviews-Monograph Musings and YA Literary Commentary

Debbie Vaughn

College of Charleston, [vaughnd@cofc.edu](mailto:vaughnd@cofc.edu)

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**From the Reference Desk**  
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nial period (1521-1800's). However, most of the concentration is on three periods, the Formative (2000 BC – AD 300), the Classic (AD 300-900) and the Postclassic (AD 900-1521). A number of articles cover the geography and climate, including the flora and fauna, and mineral and water resources. There are also articles that deal with cultural features like ethnicity and language, as well as settlement patterns, economic, social and political organization, rituals, art and the material culture. In addition, there are numerous articles on specific regions and their individual cultures, as well as on the practice of the archaeology itself. These articles cover individual sites and discoveries, various research methods and specific scholars.

*Archaeology of Ancient Mexico and Central America: An encyclopedia* is an inclusive and comprehensive scholarly work, with high production values. Editors Susan Toby Evans and David L. Webster are to be applauded. The bibliographies are solid, the index good and the text is nicely complemented with photos, diagrams, charts, as well as site and geographical maps. This is a well-conceived

and useful work, at a reasonable price. It is a natural for academic libraries. Where there is heavy interest, larger public libraries will also want to consider it.

Academic librarians, in particular, will welcome the second edition of George L. Campbell's *Compendium of the World's Languages* (2000, 0415202981, \$400). Published by Routledge, this two-volume set has been expanded to include 24 more languages and most of the remaining articles have been updated. There is coverage of nearly 400 languages or language families. All the articles follow the same structure starting with an introduction that provides historic and social background and then continues with sections on script, phonology, and morphology and syntax. In addition, each entry includes an illustrative text providing a visual of the language in print. Entries are arranged alphabetically and there is a list of all entries with appropriate "see" references for those languages not covered individually. Because of the no-frills arrangement, using this reference is fairly straightforward. However, it is not meant for the novice. There is no glossary ex-

plaining the terminology employed and to make best use of it, some knowledge of language and linguistics is necessary.

The *Compendium of the World's Languages* is authoritative and scholarly, but it gives the reader more than specifics about individual languages. While browsing through this set you are also struck by the multiplicity and richness of human language. Nonetheless, its main value is as a handy, but substantial, collection of information related to a diversity of languages. My only reservation is the price. Admittedly, this title is specialized and may have a limited audience. However, \$400 for a 2-volume set is a bit steep and libraries that own the first edition may question the high cost. Still, academic libraries that seriously support courses in linguistics and the study of comparative language will want to add this second edition to their collections.

(Those libraries needing something for their circulating collections may want to consider the paperback edition of Bernard Comrie's *The World's Major Languages* (1990, 0195065115, \$39.95) published by Oxford University Press. Although lacking coverage of Native American languages, at this price it is a real value.)



## Book Reviews — Monographic Musings and YA Literary Commentary

Column Editor: **Deborah Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

When I think of the month of February, images of red construction paper hearts lined with white rickrack and pink Cupid cutouts come to mind. Sometimes, I can even smell the heart-shaped, iced sugar cookies that my wonderful mother still makes for Valentine's Day. Certainly, the fourteenth day of the second month, the day that the legendary priest Valentine was martyred, is the most celebrated February holiday. But for those of you who may have tired of this mostly-romantic observance, or for those of you who are looking for an additional holiday to keep, the **Friends and Foundations of California Libraries** offer **Library Lover's Month**. The Library Lover's Month Web page (<http://www.calibraries.org/librarylovers/>) presents, among other things, tips on how to love your library (contribute, be a friend, volunteer, and promote) and a sample proclamation to officially declare Library Lover's Month in your library. What a wonderful way for bibliophiles to express their passion and ardor!

Of course, the heart of any library is information and books, and this month's reviewers celebrate their love of the printed word. The great **Ellen Finnie Duranceau** shares her thoughts on **Bill Bryson's** *In a Sunburned Country*; the tried-and-true **Phillip Powell** explores **Dorothea von Schwanenflugel** *Lawson's* *Laughter Wasn't Rationed*; and newcomer **Angela Megaw** dives into **Norman Desmarais's** *The ABCs of XML* and **Reaz Hoque's** *XML for Real Programmers*. A reference librarian and instructor at **Gainesville College** in **Gainesville, Georgia**, Angela received her BA in Psychology from the **University of Georgia** and her MLIS from the **University of South Carolina**. Currently, she is back at UGA working towards a **Masters in Instructional Technology**. Welcome, Angela!

This Library Lover's Month, pour your heart and mind into volumes of information, and prepare yourself for the April celebration of National Library Week. Hugs and kisses, and happy reading! — DV

### Monographic Musings

**Bryson, Bill. *In a Sunburned Country*.**  
New York: Random House, c2000.  
307p. ISBN 0767903854. \$25.00.  
[Worth every penny.] Includes Bibliography. [No index, which is a shame.]

Reviewed by **Ellen Finnie Duranceau**  
(Assistant Acquisitions Librarian for  
Digital Resources, MIT Libraries)  
<efinnie@mit.edu>

**Bill Bryson** is one of the funniest writers I know of. His latest book, *In a Sunburned Country*, is simply hilarious, and the most impressive thing about it is that you'll learn a tremendous amount about Australia while you are laughing yourself silly.

You may know Bryson as the best-selling author of *A Walk In the Woods*, about his abortive attempt to hike the entire Appalachian

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Trail, or his collection of columns on life in the US, *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*. Both books demonstrate Bryson's facility with words, his self-deprecating humor, and his ability to wryly observe and then toss amusing and apt phrases out page after page. But Bryson has reached a new peak with his stories about Australia. Somehow Bryson and Australia just go together, and if you read this book, you'll end up feeling very fond of both.

Bryson starts out this way: "Flying into Australia, I realized with a sigh that I had forgotten again who their prime minister is. I am forever doing this with the Australian prime minister—committing the name to memory, forgetting it (generally more or less instantly), then feeling terribly guilty. My thinking is that there ought to be one person outside Australia who knows....The fact is, of course, we pay shamefully scant attention to our dear cousins Down Under..." Bryson muses about how we ignore Australia throughout the book; Australia's odd absence from world history books and contemporary American media is a theme he touches upon many times. He tries to understand why: First, there is the vastness and emptiness and remoteness of Australia that keeps it outside the consciousness of most Americans. And then, Australia is like the well-behaved child in an otherwise rowdy family. No one pays it

much attention, because it usually needs no correction or redirection. As Bryson puts it, "Australia doesn't misbehave. It is stable and peaceful and good. It doesn't have coups, recklessly overfish, arm disagreeable despots, grow coca in provocative quantities, or throw its weight around in a brash and unseemly manner." Australia is "prosperous, well-ordered, and instinctively egalitarian." So we don't hear much about Australia. In 1997, Bryson notes, Australia was mentioned in the *New York Times* about as often as Belarus, and appeared to be, if numbers of stories is a good measure of importance, "slightly more important than bananas, but not nearly as important as ice cream."

And yet few countries seem to have such a compelling story to tell, if the world would only listen. Bryson draws the reader in to Australian history by emphasizing its uniqueness and quirkiness. For example, Bryson points out that no one has adequately explained how Australia first came to be populated. The Aborigines' presence there dates back some 45,000 to 60,000 years, but since humanity is not thought to have begun in Australia, humanity's presence there at that time "can only be explained by positing that they invented and mastered ocean-going craft at least 30,000 years in advance of anyone else, in order to undertake an exodus [from the nearest land mass], then forgot or abandoned nearly all that they had learned and scarcely ever bothered with the open sea

again." This is certainly a rich mystery to contemplate. Bryson provides an overview of how Australia has treated its Aborigines—a story of genocide, prejudice, and vast injustice told all too many times in other places across the globe. It is to his credit as a writer that Bryson can interweave this very painful and serious theme effectively with the light humor that predominates in the book.

The tales he tells about the Aborigines are riveting. He explains, for example, that "no Aboriginal language... had any words for 'yesterday' or 'tomorrow,' — extraordinary omissions in any culture. They had no chiefs or governing councils, wore no clothes, built no houses or other permanent structures, sowed no crops, herded no animals, made no pottery, possessed almost no sense of property. Yet they devoted disproportionate efforts to enterprises that no one even now can understand. All around the coast of Australia the early explorers found huge shell mounds, up to thirty feet high and covering at the base as much as half an acre. ...one midden was estimated to contain 33,000 cubic meters of shells — and they kept it up for an enormously long time: at least eight hundred years in one case." And he asks: "Why did they bother?" The answer: "No one knows." Stories about the distant past are cloaked in mystery and awe, but those about the recent past are painful: Bryson points out that during British occupation, "about

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twenty thousand" Aborigines were killed by whites. Bryson's revelations about the history of Aborigines in Australia are worth the price of the book alone.

The more familiar Australian history is that of the first European settlers. Bryson's wit is evident in his description of Australia's odd beginning: banished English convicts were the origin of the first European Australian population. In 1787 Captain Arthur Phillip set sail with "eleven ships — known reverentially ever after as the First Fleet — ... from Portsmouth ... he and the fifteen-hundred odd people in his care were heading off to start a colony in a preposterously remote, virtually unknown place that had been visited just once, briefly, seventeen years before and had not seen a European face since. Never before had so many people been moved such a great distance at such expense—and all to be incarcerated."

It is sobering to think of these people, mostly small-time thieves and other undesirables, along with marines and officers and their families, arriving together in an uncharted land, thousands of miles from anywhere familiar, with no hope of return. Among them they did not count a single person adept in science, husbandry, or agriculture; they had, according to Bryson, just "one experienced fisherman and no more than five people with a working knowledge of the building trade." That anyone survived at all, let alone to populate a continent (however sparsely) is astonishing. Yet this astonishing story is utterly characteristic of Australia's history, with its incongruities, (British games and culture in the middle of a desert), oddities (a reverence for anything extremely large), and obscurities (such as famous pilots written inexplicably out of history.)

Of course Australia also ultimately attracted other populations too. Bryson reveals that "essentially the gold rush of the 1850s marked the end of Australia as a concentration camp and its beginning as a nation." As Australia became a place to seek a fortune, people rushed to settle there and "when it was realized in London that transportation was seen as an opportunity rather than a punishment, that convicts desired to be sent to Australia, the notion of keeping the country a prison became unsustainable." A gold rush in Australia? I'm sure I was awake for most of my education, and I swear no one every mentioned an Australian Gold Rush.

Perhaps some of what makes Bryson a good match for Australia is his natural self-deprecation, which seems to fit a country no one notices much. One of the most hilarious sections of the book is Bryson's riff on listening to cricket on radio, which Bryson de-

cides "is like listening to two men sitting in a rowboat on a large, placid lake on a day when the fish aren't biting; it's like having a nap without losing consciousness." Bryson captures the odd Englishness, the uniquely drawn-out game and ever-serious commentators: "After a very long silence while [the commentators] absorbed this thought, and possibly stepped out to transact some small errands, they resumed with a leisurely discussion of the England fielding. ..." He goes on for a page or more with a wry evocation of what he works into a surreal experience. This section was consistently named as a favorite of people I spoke with who've read the book.

Bryson is also at his best when he discusses Australia's flora and fauna. It seems that some 80% of all "that lives in Australia, plant and animal, lives nowhere else." And this, despite the vast, endless deserts and intolerable conditions. Australia boasts 14 lethal snake species, the box jellyfish, and the funnel web spider, among many other murderous creatures. Bryson is awed, but nonplussed by this, and in one sidesplitting scene attempts (as a landlubber Midwesterner by birth) to be a good sport while learning to swim in the ocean among deadly jellyfish and sharks.

Bryson travels to every major city and many tiny outposts in all parts of Australia, over several trips, in order to complete the research for this book. Outside the big cities, Bryson finds, some parts of Australia are basically "the American Midwest of long ago." He notes when traveling near Sydney that "I was, in short, in the process of making the marvelous and heartwarming discovery that outside the cities it is still 1958 in Australia." The roads, the gas stations, the songs on the radio, even the light, remind Bryson of his midwestern childhood, and he weaves these reflections into a delightful story.

Bryson's visit to Australia's capital Canberra is an opportunity for reflection on "one of the most important planned communities on earth," and offers once again an amazing chapter of history I'd never heard. Canberra, you see, was a compromise capital: as Bryson puts it with his usual color: "Cold in the winter, blazing hot in the summer, miles from anywhere, it was an unlikely choice of location for a national capital." But it wasn't Melbourne, and it wasn't Sydney, so it was selected as a suitably neutral spot, "an obscure farming community" in New South Wales. After some consideration was given to many other options, including "Shakespeare," and "Opposum," in a seemingly odd juxtaposition of possibilities, the new capital was named. And then, name chosen, they needed to make the spot a capital. So a contest was held to see who could create the best design, and a disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright named Walter Griffin won. He

had a vision of a garden city, but his plan was never quite fully realized. What did result, in Bryson's mind, is "a scattering of government buildings in a man-made wilderness. Even the lake ... has a curiously dull, artificial feel." Bryson concludes that Canberra is "a very strange city, in that it's not really a city at all, but rather an extremely large park with a city hidden in it." The place is agreeable, but feels deserted much of the time, and is hard on pedestrians, who cannot manage the vast distances of the parkland between key buildings. Bryson is a kind fellow, but he nevertheless concludes that in Canberra "you spend much of the time feeling as if you are on some kind of long layover at an extremely spacious international airport."

No matter, most of the rest of Australia has Bryson in a delirium of wonder and wit. He loves the open friendliness of the people and the crazy quiriness of the place, a place that borders on the mystical simply out of vastness and uniqueness. Characteristic of this mystical quality is his visit to Ayers (or Uluru) Rock, a "splendid and mighty monolith," a "totally arresting" natural phenomenon. It is a rock 1,150 feet high and very red. Confronting this spectacular sight, Bryson is surprised by his reaction. "You know this rock. You know it in a way that has nothing to do with calendars and the covers of souvenir books... somehow you feel certain that this large, brooding, hypnotic presence has an importance to you at the species level ... and that in some way your visit here is more than happenstance. I'm not saying that any of this is so. I'm just saying that this is how you feel." It is this kind of personal, immediate, considered reaction that makes Bryson's observations come alive. (Although please note, this is probably the only reaction in the book that has a "New Age" cast to it. What is characteristic is that Bryson always has an interesting "take" on things, a take that is neither overly predictable nor troublingly inconsistent, either.)

There is so much in this book that can't be captured in a review, from the myriad engaging stories told, the felicitous phrases on every page, the sweeping coverage of so many places in and aspects of Australia. I should add that Bryson is nothing if not human, and I was turned off by the sophomoric drinking stories that wander in during the last quarter of the book. But pretense is clearly not Bryson's game. He is who he is; he's not hiding much. Bryson is a regular guy making silly mistakes, getting scared, forgetting things, and bumbling along. That's a big part of what makes him likeable, and what makes his books so satisfying. Please trust me that this is a book that is even better than it sounds. It is not so much a book to savor as to gulp down—yet it is a feast, not a fast food meal. Read it; you won't be sorry.

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p.s. (If you become addicted to Bryson's humor, like me, you can move on to *I'm A Stranger Here Myself*, whose chapters on Christmas decorations, tax forms, and beach visits, among others, left me crying with laughter.)

Desmarais, Norman. *The ABCs of XML: The Librarian's Guide to the eXtensible Markup Language*.

Houston: New Technology Press, 2000. 216 p. ISBN 0967594200. \$28.00.  
and Hoque, Reaz. *XML for Real Programmers*. San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann, 2000. 462 p. ISBN 0123555922. \$44.95.

Reviewed by **Angela Megaw**  
(Reference Librarian and Instructor of  
Library Science, Gainesville College,  
Gainesville, GA)  
<amegaw@gc.peachnet.edu>

Desmarais's *The ABCs of XML: The Librarian's Guide to the eXtensible Markup Language* provides a good synopsis of XML from a librarian's perspective, but don't expect to be writing code after reading it. It is best used as a reference source providing a general overview of what XML is and isn't and an annotated bibliography of additional sources. It is well organized and indexed, but the reader will need general programming know-how to grasp some concepts. Although its title states it is for librarians, there are few library-oriented uses mentioned and its audience should not be limited to librarians. *The ABCs of XML* is a practical guide to introduce anyone to XML, not just those with an MLS. It is recommended for libraries with collections on programming languages or librarians who are responsible for maintaining Web pages.



In comparison, Hoque's *XML for Real Programmers* is appropriately titled. This book is for those who truly want to learn how to write XML code. It is not for the beginner or the faint-of-heart. Prior knowledge of JAVA is required as well as some basic background knowledge of XML. If I had not read *The ABCs of XML* beforehand, I would have been completely lost. In the first chapters, Hoque goes into the depths of XML specifications. Chapters 5 through 7, along with the included CD-ROM disk, walk the reader through each line of code using an example e-commerce

site. Hoque ends the book with his vision of XML's future, which he sees as bright (although there are many critics betting XML will not survive much longer). The book is filled with acronyms galore that most "real programmers" should be familiar with; for this beginner, though, it was difficult to keep up. *XML for Real Programmers* provides an excellent index and is organized in a manner similar to the MLA style guide, which allows for easy referencing. It is recommended for libraries with extensive collections on programming languages.

Lawson, Dorothea von  
**Schwanenflugel. *Laughter Wasn't Rationed: A Personal Journey through Germany's World War and Postwar Years***, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Alexandria, VA: Tricor, 1999. 530p. ISBN 0967383048. \$24.95.

Reviewed by **Phillip Powell** (Reference Librarian and Bibliographic Instruction Coordinator, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC) <powellp@cofc.edu>

We Americans have developed a radically split view of Germany and the German people. For many in this country, ties to Germany are very strong. In the northern tier of states, a sizable percentage of residents are descended from German stock. As an Illinois native, the reviewer can attest to that fact. An urban legend tells that German nearly became the official language of the United States. Although the urban legend is not accurate, members of Congress did consider whether or not to print government materials in German back in the 1790s. Despite the strong connections, the two World Wars in the twentieth-century have strongly skewed our view of a people whose culture is so strongly linked to our own. A whole generation of Americans could refer to Kaiser Bill and his Huns. And nearly 60 years after the fact, the horrors of Hitler and Nazism raise specters still difficult to comprehend.

Enter Dorothea Schmidt von Schwanenflugel Lawson, our author. Lawson has chronicled her and her family's personal history as ordinary German citizens from the end of World War I until the time the Berlin Wall was erected. Hers is a story of what might be called the ordinary citizen caught in the midst of Germany's *sturm und drang* through much of this century. Her family's original home was in a section of then eastern Germany which now is part of Poland. In the early Weimar period following World War I, her family moved to Munster in northwest Germany located near the Dutch border. Finally, in her teens, they resettled in Berlin. All of this was done as her father established himself as a successful entrepreneur in, what appeared to be, real estate and construction.

Through hard work and diligence, they re-established for themselves a comfortable, prosperous life.

All through the book, the author creates in loving detail a picture of the life of an ordinary family living in Germany during this period. The anecdotes of her life are often charming and bring to mind events in one's own American childhood. All are set in the context of the economic and social upheaval of the Weimar government followed by the rise of the Nazis and the ultimate catastrophe of World War II. Reflective of the title, too, are quips and jokes that were circulating in Germany during the period that are randomly interspersed throughout the book. Humorous as many of them are, they are not included for comic relief, but as a reminder that the ordinary German citizen was intent upon surviving and creating a life rather than going out and conquering Europe. Yet, within her narrative, it is interesting to note that Lawson harbored negative opinions about ethnic neighbors such as Poles, Czechs, and Russians. One never hears of Polish oppression of Germans prior to World War II.

This is an extremely readable book. Truly, the reader found it hard to put down. Despite occasional sloppiness on the part of the editors, Lawson takes us through her childhood in Munster. This is followed by her early adult years in Berlin attempting to finish her education and find a career during the Nazi rise to power and as World War II began, her marriage to Sieghardt von Schwanenflugel. Particularly touching is Lawson's warm, loving relationship with her parents and her brother. Even in the most difficult of times during and following the War, Lawson's parents provided strong support to her and her young family as they all struggled to survive.

It is at this point that the reviewer must share some concerns about the book. Lawson writes of her life in considerable detail covering a span of nearly 35 years—from the end of World War I through about 1953 (when citizens of East Berlin revolted against the Soviets). The author, in her acknowledgements, gives thanks to an associate for condensing her story. Truthfully, the reviewer would prefer to read more of Lawson's story. Following the Berlin riots up until she immigrated to the United States at the time of the Berlin Wall's construction, the author's story becomes very sketchy. Questions about her parents continue to come to mind. Except for knowing that they both lived very long lives, their final years are not discussed. Also missing is any discussion of raising children in postwar Berlin during the massive reconstruction of the 1950s. It would be interesting to know about the life of a growing family during these years. The reviewer is a child of parents near to Lawson's age. The effects of the Depression and of World War II on the reviewer's parents linger

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and are still felt by the family. Although potentially traumatic, their experiences are nowhere near the excruciating uncertainties and upheavals that Lawson and her family lived through.

The book is now in its second edition with only minor adjustments. The second edition is ten pages shorter, but has a few additional photos. The most significant change is the subtitle. *Laughter Wasn't Rationed: Remembering the War Years in Germany* is now more suitably subtitled *A Personal Journey through Germany's World War and Postwar Years*.

This is a book that should be in any collection where there is an interest in modern German social history. There are few works in which the life of a non-political, twentieth-century German family is so ably discussed.

**YA Literary Commentary**

Canfield, Jack, et al. *Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul: 101 Stories of Changes, Choices and Growing Up for Kids Ages 9-13*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2000. 386p. ISBN 1558748008. \$12.95. Ages 9-13.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

I was slightly weary of reviewing Canfield and crew's *Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul*—I am not an avid self-help reader. I also questioned the benefit of self-help books for readers aged 9-13. "What can a 12-year-old possibly gain from reading sappy, sugary anecdotes?" I thought to myself. As it turns out, a lot.

Yes, the narratives are emotionally charged. True, Canfield and friends have cashed in on an entire crop of books in the *Chicken Soup* series. Let it not be denied, though, that *Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul* might be just what the doctor ordered for young adults who seem to be growing up faster and faster. In a society where *The Jerry Springer Show* receives higher ratings than daytime queen Oprah Winfrey by sporting episode titles such as "I'm a 14-Year-Old Hooker," young readers need some good, old-fashioned inspiration. The 101 stories in *Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul* are chock-full of personal accounts—most authored by preteens—that illustrate overcoming obstacles, honoring diversity, facilitating change, and self-confidence.

*Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul* is divided into sections that include Achieving Dreams, On Family, On Love, On Death and Dying, On Attitude and Perspective, On Tough Stuff, Eclectic Wisdom, and more. Often, stories begin with a thought-provok-

ing quote that describes the theme of the narrative. Several comic cartoons are sprinkled throughout the book that feature Snoopy from the *Peanuts* gang, Billy from *Family Circus*, the "wondermous" *Calvin and Hobbes* duo, and *Dennis the Menace*, just to name a few. *Chicken Soup's* selling point, though, is its tone. The writing is not "dumbed down," the accounts often spare no detail, and difficult topics—such as divorce and death—are discussed with sensitivity and respect. Even the font size is respectable by adult standards. The book concludes with "Supporting Preteens," a section that enlightens readers about preteen-friendly organizations to which celebrity contributors (boy band sensations NSYNC, soccer star Mia Hamm, and the like) donate proceeds.

For those of you who are still skeptical about the quality of *Chicken Soup*, let me expound on my favorite story. "Trash Bags are For Trash" is written by nine-year-old Makenzie Snyder from Maryland. Her narrative begins with a quote from George Eliot: "What do we live for if not to make life less difficult for each other?" At a youth conference in Paris, Makenzie met two foster children who told her about their trash bags. When in transit, foster children receive a trash bag to lug around their belongings. Feeling that this was almost inhumane, Makenzie started purchasing suitcases and duffle bags at yard sales to give to the Department to Social Services for distribution among foster kids. Soon, she started putting a "friend" in the bags as well—a stuffed animal. Makenzie has received support from *Freddie Mac*, *Nike*, *Lands' End*, the *Rosie O'Donnell Show!*, and *President and Senator Clinton*. Makenzie has sent thousands of bags, stuffed animals, and friendly messages to foster children all over the United States. Visit her organization at [www.childrentochildren.org](http://www.childrentochildren.org).

How's that for inspiration? Add *Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul* to your public library collection. Add it to your school library collection. Add it to your personal collection. It truly is just what the doctor ordered.

Rennison, Louise. *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson*. First American ed. HarperCollins Publishers, c2000. 247p. ISBN 0060288140; ISBN 006028871X (lib. binding). \$15.95. Ages 12 and up.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

August 23, 10:00 a.m. ... "[Uncle Eddie] doesn't seem to realize that I no longer wear romper suits. I feel like yelling at him, 'I am fourteen years old, Uncle Eddie! I am bursting with womanhood, I wear a bra! OK, it's a bit on the loose side and does ride up around

my neck if I run for the bus...but the womanly potential is there, you bald coot!"

So begins Louise Rennison's *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson*. The title alone will attract readers (it certainly attracted my attention). At an age when it can be difficult associating reading with fun, Rennison's premier novel will have young adults rolling and holding their bellies with laughter.

Georgia—Rennison's British leading lady—is like every fourteen-year-old young woman. She dislikes school, she is preoccupied with boys, she is anxious about kissing (or, as the Brits say, "snogging"), and she wants her peers to think she is "all that." *Full-Frontal Snogging* is Georgia's diary from which readers learn about every aspect of her early-teen life. No detail is left out—from her eyebrow-shaving incident to her little sister's awful potty habit to her Scottish mountain cat Angus. Through her journal entries, we learn that Georgia is clever, terribly funny, and utterly adorable. For all of us non-British readers, a glossary of British slang is included so that we can fully grasp Georgia's wit and humor.

Other than being a plain-old *fun* novel, *Full-Frontal Snogging* hones in on issues that all young women face: the trials and tribulations of dating, the pains of crushes, the difficulties of long-distance parents, and the work involved in maintaining friendships, to name a few. Rennison is not preachy in her dealings with these issues, however; she gives "lessons" through hilarious happenings in the Life of Georgia. To illustrate how silly it is to conform to society's idea of beauty, Rennison creates an unforgettable eyebrow-trimming scene. While attempting to sculpt and arch her brows, Georgia accidentally shaves them completely off. (Whoops!) To demonstrate the angst involved with first kisses, Rennison casts Georgia with Peter Dyer, the Professional Kisser. One day after school, Georgia goes over to Peter's house to learn how to kiss. By 9:20 that night, she writes in her journal, "Oh, we got through a lot in a half an hour. We did a bit of tongues, which was the bit I was most scared of, but actually it wasn't too bad...Peter says you can take a horse to water but you can't make it kiss properly." Later in the week, after Peter asks Georgia on a date, she laments that she is "a facsimile of a sham and a fax of a person. And I have a date with a professional snogger." Rennison has a unique ability to take serious issues and to bathe them in a light-hearted radiance. While Georgia makes us laugh, we never doubt that she takes her problems seriously; as a bright young woman, though, she also knows how to take them in stride.

If Georgia Nicolson were real, I'd be the first in line to be her friend. Chances are, your YA patrons would be in that line with me. Go ahead and add it to your collection—Georgia would most certainly approve. 